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With the best wishes of  
George L. Fox.

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND  
ITS WORK.

A PAPER BY  
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[From the *Yale Review*, May, 1895.]



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## THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND ITS WORK.

THOUGH the British Parliament conferred upon the other cities of Great Britain large powers of municipal government two years before Queen Victoria came to the throne, the inhabitants of the capital of the kingdom, outside of the City of London, were not allowed a municipal representative government worthy of the name until the year after her Jubilee in 1887. This long delayed grant of limited municipal powers finally came in an unsatisfactory form. The municipal charter of London has no specific number or name among the Parliamentary acts of Queen Victoria's reign. It is comprised mainly in clauses 40 to 45 of the Local Government Act of 1888, the purpose of which was to transfer the local government of the shires of England from the hands of the squires and clergy to county councils elected by the voters. It seems, therefore, somewhat strange that Her Majesty's Government should have incorporated the provisions for the difficult municipal administration of London with an act for the sparsely settled counties of England. As London occupies the three contiguous corners of Middlesex, Surrey, and Kent, Parliament set off these corners into a new county called "The Administrative County of London," and certain municipal powers over this area were vested in the London County Council.

The organization of the Council is of a type quite familiar to English citizens through their city charters, but strange to Americans. Of its 137 members, 118 are councilors, elected by the parliamentary constituencies of London, two from each constituency, and four from the ancient City. The nineteen remaining members, or about one-seventh of the whole body, are of the so-called aldermanic rank. These aldermen are chosen in two divisions triennially for a term of six years, by the Council, elected itself only for three years, and in this matter acting as an electoral college.

The electorate which chooses the Council differs from that of the same area whose representatives sit in the House of Commons. Peers and women who are householders or rate payers may vote for councilors, while a certain class of Parliamentary voters are excluded from the Council register, and plural voting, i. e., voting in different electoral districts by the same elector—a system which prevails in the elections for the House of Commons—is forbidden in Council elections. The main basis of suffrage for the Council is the payment of an annual rate, that is, local taxes, which are paid by occupiers to Overseers of the Poor, while those in service and lodgers, although they vote at Parliamentary elections, are excluded from the Council electorate. Practically all legally qualified electors are eligible to membership in the Council except women. Two women were elected councilors to the first Council and one was chosen as alderman by that body, but the courts held them ineligible.

The particular features of the Council, which impress an American as in sharp contrast with our own forms of municipal government, are these: the aldermanic rank; the fact that all elected councilors are elected for three years and go out of office at one time; the absence of any qualification requiring residence in a constituency on the part of a councilor; and the concentration of all power in a single body, which, within the limited sphere of its functions, exercises both executive and legislative powers combined.

The feature of co-opted aldermen in municipal government in England is not viewed with favor by the Liberals, who are disposed to consider it a useless mediæval survival. It was opposed by them in the framing of the Local Government Act of 1888, when they were the Opposition, and in the Parish Councils Act of 1893, which is the achievement of the present Liberal ministry, it receives no recognition. But the aldermanic principle seems to have worked well in the first two London Councils. This method of indirect election makes it possible to call into the municipal service men of large experience and expert knowledge, who would not care to enter into the turmoil of popular electoral contests, but are ready to heed the call of the municipal council.

For instance, the first London County Council, elected in 1889, had before it the great task of organizing an administration and of framing a municipal policy. Great questions of finance and of taxation at once came to the front. Lord Farrer, the eminent economist who for many years was the permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade, was then elected an alderman for six years, although he had been beaten in his candidacy for East Marylebone, in the first Council election. As Vice-Chairman of the first Council he was *ex-officio* a member of all standing committees, and has been a leader in the proposals to municipalize the water supply of London. The present Vice-Chairman of the Committee of Finance, Lord Welby, formerly permanent Secretary of the Treasury, is another instance of the same kind. The aldermanic rank also permits the Council to retain the services of former able and efficient members who may have failed of reëlection.

The term of service of councilors, three years, is longer than that of the members of most American municipal bodies, but is the same as prevails in the other municipal boroughs of England. The London Council, however, differs from the other English municipal councils in having the term of all elected councilors expire at one time. In the other English cities one-third are elected each year. The obvious danger possible under the former system of an entirely new and inexperienced council, which might result from a political upheaval, has not thus far been realized in the case of London. Nearly sixty per cent. of the Second Council had been members of the first, while in the recent elections to the Third Council, which were fought with much bitterness and resulted in a decided upheaval, slightly over sixty per cent. of the old members were returned at the head of the poll in their districts. The vicious principle of rotation in office which does so much to weaken the character of our municipal governments has little hold in English cities.

In the election of their municipal legislators, also, they are much more fortunate than we in the range of choice open to the electors. Any resident of London may represent any constituency which chooses him as its councilor. In these Council elections, as well as in the Parliamentary, the con-

stituents are not hampered by locality restrictions in seeking the best representatives. The present Prime Minister, Lord Roseberry, sat for the City of London in the First Council, and for East Finsbury, a poor district north of the city in the Second, while his London residence is in the West End near Hyde Park.

It is the genius of English municipal government to concentrate in the Council both the executive and legislative functions within the municipal sphere, and the London County Council is no exception to the rule. In the exercise of the powers granted by Parliament, it appoints its executive staff and frames its ordinances subject to the veto of no elected Mayor. Technically it has no Lord Mayor, but its Chairman corresponds to the Lord Mayor of the provincial cities, and might be called the Lord Mayor of Greater London to distinguish him from the occupant of the Mansion House.

The personnel of all the Councils thus far has been notable and of high quality. The success of the First Council in organizing the machinery and in starting the wheels of municipal government in London was largely due to the abilities and laborious devotion of the present Prime Minister of England, Lord Roseberry. He was chairman of the First Council during most of its existence. His successor was Sir John Lubbock, the eminent banker, writer and Member of Parliament. The next chairman, Sir John Hutton, presided over the Council longer than his predecessors. He devoted all his time to the work of the Council and was an admirable, businesslike chairman. The chairman of the new council, Mr. Arthur Arnold, is a brother of Sir Edwin Arnold, a former Member of Parliament and writer on economic topics, whose books on "Through Persia by Caravan" and "Social Politics" are known a little in this country. He is not at present a member of the Council, but was alderman in the first two Councils. Frederic Harrison was an alderman for several years, and his brother, Mr. Charles Harrison, a prominent solicitor, is one of the most tireless workers of the Council and was Vice-Chairman of the last one. The Council soon after its organization divided into two parties,

viz: the Progressives, who favor radical reform, and the Moderates, who have opposed most of the measures of the Progressives. Naturally most of the members are from the middle and upper classes of London, but the wage-earners and laborers are also represented. In the First Council John Burns was about the only Labor member, but in the Second he had a dozen colleagues in the labor interest. In each Council there has been an average of a half dozen peers, usually peers of the right sort, viz., those who have won their title and position in the House of Lords by their own brains and energy, and have not had distinction thrust upon them by the accident of birth. The Moderate victory in the last election has brought into the Council chamber some peers of the latter sort, and it remains to be seen whether the Earl of Dunraven and Lord Montmorries will give to London's needs as much able and devoted effort as Lord Farrer and Lord Welby have done.

The average age of the members puts them in middle life, so that the Council in its deliberations is likely to have the benefit of mature judgment and ripe experience. Only a few young men are in its ranks, while the number of white or whitening heads is considerable. In each Council there have been a few active or former members of Parliament, and this feature of the personnel seems desirable, as the affairs of the Council are often a subject of debate in the House of Commons, when the bills which it promotes are under discussion.

About one-sixth of each Council have been graduates of Oxford or Cambridge. In occupation a large majority of the members are active or retired bankers, lawyers, including both barristers and solicitors, merchants, manufacturers and doctors, with some young men of the Arnold Toynbee type, who, inheritors of wealth and leisure, find their pleasure in the service of the municipality.

The membership of the Council is notable not only for those who sit in the chamber at Spring Gardens, but for those who are conspicuous by their absence. That bane of municipal governments in America, the saloon-keeper, who is known in England as the publican, is rarely found there as a municipal legislator. Of the whole number of 137,

the liquor interest was ostensibly represented in the First council by one stray brewer, and in the Second by only one whiskey-distiller and two ex-publicans. To the London Moderates or Conservatives belongs the discreditable distinction of having put forward seven candidates representing the liquor interest in the last election. Fortunately only three of these were elected, and it is to be hoped in the future that the London nominating committees and constituencies will take warning of the experience of American cities, and always look upon a representative of the liquor interest as a *persona non grata* in the Council.

The term applied to the central executive authority of London, London *County* Council, seems rather a misnomer. Its functions are much more in common with the municipal boroughs of England than with the rural shires. But the powers which thus far Parliament has allowed it to exercise are much more limited than those of other English cities or of municipalities of the United States. The common duties of local government, viz., the maintenance of the streets and the care of the poor, fall in London chiefly to the smaller units of local authority, the parishes and districts, the latter being simply combinations of small parishes. In highway maintenance the Council has control only over one of the great boulevards that fringe England's famous river, known as the Victoria Embankment and eleven miles of other roads. In the matter of drainage its powers are somewhat more extended. While the local sewers are maintained by the parishes and districts, the great trunk sewers north and south of the Thames are under the control of the Council, and upon it falls the mighty task of disposing of the sewage of the great metropolis. It maintains all the London public bridges across the Thames, except those controlled by the City Corporation. Farther down the river, where ocean commerce practically makes a bridge impossible, at Blackwall, it is building a great tunnel; while still farther down, at Woolwich, it maintains a free ferry, the counterpart of which can hardly be found in the world. In regard to protection against fire its power extends both over Greater London and the City. This ancient municipality, forming

the inner core of London, with an area of one square mile and a resident population of less than fifty thousand, is still under the government of the Corporation, which is endowed with large municipal functions including control of its police. The London Council however has not yet been put to the severest test to which a local government can be subjected, viz., the exercise of the police power. That is controlled by Parliament in the Metropolis, outside of the City.

The Council also has charge of the parks and open spaces of London, except the royal parks in the West End, and in the exercise of this power some of its most beneficent work has been done. It maintains and manages six insane asylums for the distraught poor of London and supports two industrial and reformatory schools. While the management of public education in London is in the hands of the London School Board, the Council has intimate connection with technical education. It has not for this purpose established institutions of its own, but strengthened worthy existing institutions like the London Polytechnics.

The clearing of unsanitary areas and the housing of the working classes are municipal functions which few of our American cities have as yet assumed, but the Council has authority from Parliament to do this, and is actively discharging its functions in this direction.

Such in the main are the especially administrative powers of the Council. But it also has important powers in inspecting and supervising the subordinate local authorities, corporations, and individuals. It is licensing authority for certain theatres and all music halls. No electric company can lay a main in any street without its consent, while it can force the water companies to furnish a constant supply. The Council has large powers with regard to the planning of streets and construction of buildings, being authorized to prescribe height and size of buildings, together with character of foundations and building materials to be used. It sends its officials to inspect dairies, gas, weights and measures, sale of coal, and the number of working hours required of young persons.

One of its most important functions may be described as the duty of watching generally over the public interests, and most worthily has it magnified this office. Thus it stands in the halls of Parliament as the champion of the many, and especially of the poor, against vested interests and private greed. Its Parliamentary Committee keeps a close watch on all proposed legislation at Westminster affecting in any way the citizens of London. It executes the Council's wishes in opposing bills, or in obtaining amendments of them in the interests of the public.

When the Salisbury Parliament created the London County Council, it gave to it municipal powers quite inferior to those wielded by other English cities. Consequently the Parliamentary Committee, in addition to opposing bills, has had the important task of promoting bills in Parliament with a view to reforming abuses or enlarging the functions of the Council. Every year it has uttered in Parliament Oliver Twist's righteous cry, "More."

Through its Parliamentary Committee, each year, the Council has secured large extension of its powers, both from the justice of its arguments and the record of efficient exercise of its present functions, to which it could point. It has at last secured the right to own the tramways, or horse railroads, in spite of active filibustering on the part of the Moderates in the Council, and stubborn litigation on the part of the companies in the courts, which carried the test case to the Lords of Appeal, and resulted in a verdict for the Council.

They are moving also to control the water supply. Bills are now in progress in Parliament authorizing the Council to purchase the property of the eight water companies who now furnish water to London, and to exercise that very proper municipal function, which is discharged by every other great city in England save Bristol.

The congestion of population in East London so brutalizing, and destructive of the happiness, health, morals and life of the poor, has lain heavily upon the minds of the members of the Council, and earnest efforts have been made to lighten—one can hardly say to solve—this most difficult problem.

They have sought to bring about a centrifugal tendency of the population in order to people the fields of suburban London with the families whose life now is ever pent up in the squalid courts, lanes and slums of the great city. To make this possible, rapid and cheap transit from home to workshop was a first essential. This the Council endeavored to bring about with all its power. In the case of existing railroads, its chief method, of course, was amicable conference with the authorities, looking to frequent trains in the early morning hours, at as cheap a rate as possible, which would still yield a fair profit to the companies. But where new charters for railways into London were asked of Parliament, it has insisted that all new charters shall provide for workingmen's trains early and late in the day at the lowest possible fares.

Among its notable achievements have been the organization of an administrative establishment, and the adoption of efficient methods for transacting the public business. This central executive authority of London has its home in a building of moderate size, standing between Trafalgar Square and St. James Park. The Hotel de Ville of Greater London is quite inferior in its internal and external architecture to some town halls of London vestries, but the Council has steadily refused to increase the burden of the rate payer by building an expensive city hall, as long as this building could be made to serve its purpose. Its regular meetings occur once a week, on Tuesday afternoon throughout the year, except in the vacation months of August and September. This municipal legislature—which Mr. Joseph Chamberlain sneeringly speaks of as the “brilliant luminary somewhere in the neighborhood of Spring Gardens”—judged by personal observation and the records of its work, is a most efficient and businesslike body, of which Londoners have reason to be proud, and American citizens may well be envious.

Considering the nearness of Spring Gardens to Westminster, and the overshadowing influence of Parliament in English affairs, one would expect to find the Council's methods largely framed upon the Parliamentary model. But such is not the case. The Council chamber is semi-circular in its

arrangement of seats, and not oblong as is the House of Commons. Political opponents do not sit facing each other but side by side. While Progressives and Moderates are mingled indiscriminately, the Labor members sit in a group. This arrangement takes away that gladiatorial appearance which makes the House of Commons so interesting a place to the lover of forensic struggle, but it probably tends to lessen political solidarity in the discussion of measures. As the counterpart of the Ministry Bench in the Commons, the front circle of seats is occupied by the chairmen of committees, whose reports and recommendations are the chief subject of discussion. It is noteworthy that though in both Councils the Progressives had a large majority, some of the chairmen were Moderates. Every speech is limited to fifteen minutes unless extended by general consent, and a vote on closure is put on the demand of two members.

These restrictions seem to account for the absence of those orators who often afflict the House of Commons, and make the weary visitor regret that there is no restaurant or smoking room, adjoining the Strangers' Gallery. Every man who attends a meeting must register in the attendance book kept for that purpose, and the record of attendance is published each week with the minutes. According to the published records of the two Councils the Progressives have been far more regular and faithful in attention to their duties than the Moderates.

Publicity, indeed, seems to be the keynote of the Council's methods as the best preventive of corruption and lax administration. Mr. John Burns' epitaph on the Metropolitan Board of Works, "Killed by secrecy, buried by publicity," would hardly be possible of its successor.

By the Act which created the Council, it is provided that no costs, debts, or liability exceeding \$250.00 shall be incurred except upon a resolution of the Council passed on an estimate submitted by the Finance Committee. Usually the first business of every meeting is the opening of tenders or bids for work to be done, which are submitted in sealed packets. After being opened by the chairman, these are referred to the proper committees for consideration. Politi-

cal "pulls" either to obtain contracts or place find no encouragement. Personal canvassing for positions in the gift of the Council and the personal solicitation of orders for goods or the leaving of samples are prohibited. All applications for office and all offers for supplies must be made in writing to the clerk of the Council. Every person in the employ of the Council, no matter how small the wage, must be appointed or removed by the Council in open meeting on the recommendation of the committee having the especial departments in charge.

One reason for the great efficiency and success of municipal government in England is the dominance in the administration of affairs of the merit system for the selection of officials. The curse of the spoils system, which views the public service as a swill trough, where those with the strongest political influence may fatten on public patronage, seems to have been thoroughly stamped out in England.

Considering the large amount of detail in the business transacted by the Council, it is surprising to find that its work is promptly finished by a single weekly session of four hours, with an occasional extra session. It is the common experience to clear up the docket at the close of each session. Seldom are any arrears of business carried over to the next meeting. This end has been achieved by the skill of its presiding officers, by the earnest labors of its members on the 40 committees and sub-committees, and by certain labor and time-saving expedients, which greatly facilitate the transaction of business. The legislative calendar, called in England the agenda paper, is a model document, which does more than any other one thing to speed the transaction of business. This interesting document of about thirty pages each week mirrors the municipal life of London, and shows how admirable is the division of labor and the devolution of power among the committees by which the wheat is sifted from the chaff, and the necessary business is brought within such a compass that it can be disposed of at the weekly meeting of the Council. The work of forty or fifty meetings of committees during the week has crystallized in this compact form. A printed copy of the agenda paper is sent to each

member two days before the meeting. Full information is thus given him as to the questions to be considered and the proposals of the committees in charge of the business. Each motion, proposed by a committee, is preceded by a terse statement of the necessary facts in the case, and the reasons which have led the committee to their decision. In this way oral explanation is made unnecessary, and the work is rapidly put through.

Naturally the report of the Finance Committee, dealing often with large sums of expenditure, stands always first on the paper. It is accompanied by a weekly cash paper, giving in full detail the financial condition of the Council up to the date of the preceding meeting. Within the compass of a dozen foolscap pages are contained estimates of all costs, debt or liability exceeding \$250.00, proposed payments on orders of the Council, receipts from all sources, and balances. It is in fact a weekly balance sheet of the County of London, open to the inspection of every citizen.

Before reviewing certain special and particular features in the achievements of the London Council, one or two general characteristics and effects of its administration should be noted. In six years it has done much to awaken the sense of civic duty and municipal patriotism in the citizens of London. Visitors to London before 1888 found that many residents of the city neither knew nor cared to know how they were governed in local affairs. The sense of what the municipality can do for the people in preventing injustice and in promoting justice and happiness, was largely dormant. To the questions of right and wrong that are so powerfully voiced in Sidney Webb's "The London Program," the large majority were indifferent. But a change has come. The public sessions of the council, the measures that it has promoted, the battles which it has fought for the many against the interests of the few, and the material changes that it has wrought in London itself have been an object lesson to the dullest man, reminding him that he is a citizen of no mean city, just as the light in the tower of the Houses of Parliament by Westminster Bridge reminds him of the empire which encircles the globe with its sway. It is a truism

that political campaigns, when fought on lines of public policy and principle, are great popular educators, and serve to shrivel up that dry rot of free government, civic indifference. So the yeast has worked in London. Far more than ever before questions of municipal policy have become pressing questions of the day. While to young men who look forward to a political career, efficient service in the Council is an excellent pathway to the House of Commons.

The Council has also shown a high moral and altruistic purpose. It has labored with a conscience. It has seemed to feel that in large degree it was its brother's keeper. It has not looked upon liberty as synonymous with license, but amid much unjust abuse it has labored to repress immorality. Some of its most creditable achievements show a keen sympathy with the poor, and those whose cowed spirit or lack of means keeps them from defending their rights. The famous campaign against immoral features of the music halls has been vindicated by the leading ministers and by lovers of decent amusements. It has taken a notable stand for temperance and against the liquor traffic. The license to sell liquor in England is a vested interest, of a high commercial value. In making improvements the Council has often purchased property on which were public houses or saloons, whose licenses were valuable. These it has allowed to lapse at large pecuniary loss in order to diminish the number of saloons within a given area. It has also refused to allow public houses to be built upon its property. It has banished beer from the insane asylums, with great benefit to the inmates, and a consequent increase in the percentage of cures. The sale of liquor also at the refreshment stands in the parks has been abolished. One of the requirements which the Council made in the famous Empire Music Hall case was that the drinking of liquor should be excluded from the auditorium, and it carried its point. The council may well be praised for some of the enemies it has made. It has won the ill will of the liquor dealers, who in the last election would seem to have acted against the Progressives as allies of the Moderate party.

In gratuitous and laborious toil for the public service, and in economical use of other people's money, the Council has set a noble example. Many of its members have been perfect gluttons for work. There are on an average from thirty to forty meetings each week of committees, sub-committees or the Council, amounting to a total of 1676 meetings in the year 1893-1894. The average attendance of each Progressive member during this period was nearly 150 meetings; the average attendance of each Moderate member was a trifle under 100. Some members spend regularly one, two and three days in the service of the Council, and the insomnia from which Lord Roseberry now suffers was experienced during his chairmanship of the first Council and was due in some degree to his unwearying labors at Spring Gardens. Membership on some of these committees entails journeying to all parts of London, to the insane asylums or industrial schools outside of the city, or to the outfall sewer works, farther down the Thames. For the necessary expense involved in such labors, they receive only traveling expenses. Standing order No. 149 allows each member only the actual cost of locomotion or mileage to and from the places visited and the central offices of the council, but often members pay their own fares. If they take meals at the asylums or schools, they pay for them as at hotels. There is no wine cellar at the Council House in Spring Gardens as there is at the Guildhall. All this may seem to the cynical like standing up so straight as to bend backward, but it is a refreshing contrast to the junketing and wine-bibbing at the public expense of the committees of the Corporation of the City of London, and of some American State legislatures and city councils.

But the highest tribute must be paid the Council for the purity of its administration. This body in its short existence has had the pioneer task of organizing and administering municipal government for a city with a population more than twice that of New York City, concentrated within an area very little larger than that of the American Metropolis. It has had extremely difficult problems to deal with, peculiar to Old World cities, and thus far little known to us. It has paid out each year from ten to fifteen millions of dollars. Yet the

record of this body so far as corruption is concerned is practically stainless. It has done its work under unstinted abuse from many of the London Tory papers, as if it were a body of thugs preying upon the state instead of hard working servants of the people, yet I can not remember to have heard or seen any charge against the purity of its administration, which had any solid basis. During the discussion of the Equalization of Rates Bill in the Commons last summer, some of the irresponsible Tory members on the back benches of the Opposition undertook something of that sort, but they were sharply rebuked for it by the leading evening Conservative paper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Though the words of Frederic Harrison on this point, written in 1890, may seem extravagant to those who are familiar with the insidious and common tendency to corruption in municipal affairs, I believe that they may be taken with no large grain of allowance as true of the Council during the whole of its past career.

"It is not a little thing that for once a great capital has a municipality in which fraud and jobbery are as completely extinct as vigilance can make them. A member suspected of leniency to either would run the risk of being torn to pieces, and the chairman would hardly succeed in preventing bloodshed on the floor of the Council."

One who contrasts the conduct of municipal affairs for the last six years at the head of navigation on the Thames and at the mouth of the Hudson, however enthusiastic and loyal an American he may be, must allow that in efficient municipal government, at least, the United States does not beat the world.

Among the specific achievements of the Council, few have been more notable than the position it has taken on the labor question. This occurred during the First Council, and is all the more noticeable from the fact that in that body there were very few direct representatives of labor, except Mr. John Burns, who was practically responsible for the Council's action.

<sup>1</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 27, p. 1039.

The principle of the minimum or living wage, which it adopted as an example for other public and private employers of labor, was first brought into national prominence by the great London strike of 1889. It bases the amount of the wage not on what the wage-earner will consent to receive, pinched by hunger and under the stress of need, but what he should fairly have in order to maintain a reasonable standard of living. The Council early in its career decided not to buy its labor in the cheapest market, but to decide upon a moral minimum of earnings below which it was not expedient that any London citizen should sink. In the case of skilled labor, this was accomplished by adopting the trade-union rate of wages, viz., the scale of prices agreed upon by the two organizations representing the employers and the employed in each particular trade.

In the case of unskilled labor, as no organization existed, the Council had to decide for itself what was the minimum required for efficient and decent existence. That standard it set for men at twelve and a half cents per hour, one dollar per day for the eight-hour day and six dollars for a week of forty-eight hours. The weekly wage for women was four dollars and a half. In Mr. Charles Booth's famous volumes, the actual poverty line in London is set at \$5.25 per week, regular wages. It would not seem, therefore, that the Council has been extravagant in setting the standard of the living wage. In order that its requirements on this score may not be evaded, it has passed stringent regulations and provides rigid inspection for all firms with whom it makes contracts for supplies or work.

The principle of the living wage has been ridiculed and satirized by editor, magazine writer, and dramatist, but the meanest blow below the belt which has been given it, was in the speech of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain at Stepney last February. He there, by disingenuous insinuation, charged that the application of the principle by the Council was very much like bribery and an approach to the corrupt methods of Tammany Hall. The legitimate inference from his speech would seem to be that sweating is a civic virtue and those who try to prevent it are corrupt enemies

of the state. Americans, who are more familiar with the habits of the Tammany Tiger than the Member for West Birmingham, realize not only how mean but how unjust such a charge was. If the true rule of business life be, as it was once formulated by an experienced business man, "when you get a competitor in a tight place, to squeeze him for all he is worth," why then John Burns is a dreamer of dreams, and Mr. Chamberlain in this matter is the apostle of the truth. But if, as many still think, the Golden Rule should affect human endeavor, and justice and mercy are not iridescent dreams, then we may honor Mr. John Burns, not only as an able and self-sacrificing municipal legislator, but as one who has wrought mightily for those who earn their daily bread by the sweat of the brow. If this charge were true, it would lie not only against the hero of the Dock Strike, but against the Right Hon. David Plunkett, Conservative Member for Dublin University, and formerly First Commissioner of Works. On February 13, 1891, he moved a resolution for the adoption of the principle of the living wage, by the Conservative Government then in power, in all Government employments, and it was unanimously carried. Now more than 250 local government bodies in England have put the principle into practice. One finds it hard to understand how Mr. Chamberlain in that Stepney speech could so turn his back on his noble municipal career at Birmingham, as to uphold the City Aldermen and attack the men who are trying to do for London with equal zeal and devotion what he and his colleagues did for Birmingham.

Besides adopting the principle of the living wage, the Council has taken steps to abolish the contractor, and to do its own work by direct employment of labor. It was led to this action by the fact that in a number of instances, either through combination of contractors or force of circumstances, the tenders made to the Council for doing certain work much exceeded the architect's estimates of cost. From the very first the Council had adopted the principle of direct employment of labor in all work of a continuous nature, not requiring a large outlay of plant, like cleansing the bridges and embankments. After three years' trial the average

annual cost of cleansing the bridges per square yard proved to be 75 cents, where previous contractors had charged \$1.00 or \$1.25. Thus it was led to extend the principle from maintenance to actual construction of buildings. Its building staff constructed a schoolhouse within the architect's estimates, although the figures of all contractors' bids for the work ranged nearly 25 per cent. above those estimates. It built below ground with equal success and economy. Its sewers were thoroughly constructed by its own workmen at a cost about 40 per cent. under the contractors' figures.

The Works Department, first established in March, 1893, has steadily enlarged its activity. It takes its stand in line with other contractors. For all work to be done of any value above \$250.00, an estimate is submitted by an expert outside of the Works Department. Then the Department has the first chance to figure. If it thinks that it can do the work within the figures, it takes the job. If not, it is put up for tender to outside contractors. If the cost of construction exceeds the estimates, when the Works Department has undertaken the job, the difference is made up out of the Council's treasury. But in the case of a contractor, the loss would fall upon him.

Mr. Sidney Webb gives the full details of this experiment in his address before the Economic Section of the British Association at the Oxford meeting last August. It is only fair to say that thus far the sum total of cost of all works directly executed by the Council, amounting to \$1,000,000, has exceeded by only \$10,000 the sum total of the architect's estimates. One swallow does not make a summer, and two years is all too short to judge of the permanent success of such a scheme. It is to be hoped that the creditable record of the past may be maintained. The nub of the whole matter depends on whether labor in this way can be kept faithful and efficient, and whether salaried superintendence can be maintained which shall be intelligent and energetic. There seems to be a general tendency among English municipalities towards the direct employment of labor in public works, and to do away with the intervention of the contractor.

The Council may well be proud of its success in the difficult problem of the disposal of the sewage of London. It controls the great trunk sewers on each side of the Thames, into which the local sewers drain, and it must dispose of the refuse. When the Council began its work the sewage flowed into the Thames in unaltered filthiness, making the "Silver Thames" in the Jubilee Year at London far different from the "Sweete Themmes" of Spenser's song. By improved machinery and chemical treatment a great change has been wrought. From the outfall works at Barking and Crossness, the residual fluid flows harmless into the river, while the harmful sludge is carried in ships for deposit in the lower reaches of the river near its mouth. The purification of the river is discernible by the eye, and is shown by the return of the fish to their old-time haunts near the city, so that John Burns was not uttering an idle boast when he told the members of the House of Commons that they might some day go fly-fishing off the terrace of the Houses of Parliament.

In its administration of the parks and pleasure grounds the Council has labored both for the health and pleasure of the people. Verily it has "given lungs to London." The number of acres of common pleasure ground has risen in six years from 2,600 to nearly 4,000. Some of these additions have been made by private beneficence, and some by concerted action of the Council and the local vestries.

One of the new acquisitions has a historical significance which emphasizes the great gain from the days of the Restoration to the present time. On the slope of Highgate Hill is a beautiful park, once the garden about the residence of a woman more famous for her beauty than her virtue. The grounds where Nell Gwynn received her royal lover, "gay King Charlie," are now open, with the beautiful lawns, flower beds and tennis courts, to the poorest citizen of London.

Its administration of the parks has been admirable. They are to be enjoyed, not merely looked at. They have been greatly beautified in appearance, and most careful provision has been made for those outdoor sports which are the national pastime. Two hundred and fifty cricket pitches,

carefully tended and kept in good playing condition, were used for about 6,000 matches during 1890. Its tennis courts, numbering more than 300, are estimated to have been used by over 100,000 players, while on its seventy-five special foot ball grounds about 5000 matches were played last year. The golf enthusiast is also given space for his links, careful attention to the pleasure of skaters in the winter is paid, and during the summer the Council maintains its own bands, which furnish music to the throngs of pleasure seekers. A most beneficent feature of its work in this direction has been the opening of disused burial grounds as breathing places for the poor, so that these resting places of the dead have become in a real sense resting places for the living.

The Council has discharged ably a most proper function of government in making the water and gas companies perform their duties properly. The water companies, though making large profits, have furnished a miserable service to many parts of London. A constant supply of water, which is the rule in our cities, has until recently been rare in many districts of the Capital of England. In 1889 more than forty per cent. of the houses of London had only an intermittent supply of water, so that the necessary appendage of a house was a cistern in which could be stored a supply for the hour of need. Under the prodding of the Council, the number of these unfortunate homes, which do not have running water all day, has been lessened one-half. Against vigorous opposition, the Council is very properly striving to take the water supply into its own hands. The bill for taking over one company, the Lambeth, has already passed its second reading in the Commons, and in course of time the Council will doubtless take its stand by the other municipalities of England, as the controller of this essential of human life.

It has also striven for good light. With constant diligence it has prodded the gas companies to the maintenance of a standard quality of illuminating gas. The occupation of its 20 inspectors is to test the purity of the gas supply and to test gas meters. Before a meter can be used it must be submitted for official verification, and must bear the stamp of the official inspector. Gas is furnished by three colossal

consolidated companies. Daily tests are made at twenty official stations, and at other places by portable photometers. If the quality is much below the required illuminating power, the companies are reported. They may appeal to the chief gas examiner of the Imperial Board of Trade. In the year 1892-1893, of 118 cases so reported 86 were sustained by that official, and the companies had consequently to pay about \$1,300 in fines and costs.

All the petroleum supply entering the port of London must pass the approval of its inspectors, and it has carried on some very interesting experiments with regard to the best lamps for safety, in order to protect life and property from the great destruction that has arisen from exploding lamps.

The Council's keen sympathy for the poor has been notably evident in its relentless fight against false weights and measures, and cheating coal dealers. This is especially necessary in London, where the markets of the poor are chiefly in the streets. They buy largely from the peripatetic costermongers, more or less irresponsible, who, in order to change their place of business, have merely to fold their tents like the Arabs and silently steal away. All such dealers are liable at any time to receive a sudden visit from the inspector, who tests their weights and measures. Last year nearly 900,000 weights, measures and weighing instruments were verified and stamped, while nearly 250,000 were examined and rejected as unfit.

Coal in England is delivered in canvas bags and not as with us in open carts. In both countries the poor, buying in small lots, have often been unmercifully swindled. In London these fraudulent dealers have been vigorously pursued by the Council's inspectors so that the bags in use have had to be lengthened to make the measure full. For the same reason the refuse from the pit's mouth is no longer sold as the best Wallsend coal.

Space forbids more than mere mention of the other notable achievements. Its management of the insane asylums has been humane, beneficial, and scientific. It has greatly increased the efficiency of the Fire Department, which is maintained at an expense about one-half the cost of the New

York City Fire Department. It has fought the great struggle for "betterment" assessments which is still undecided. It has its armor on for other great reforms in local taxation. It has waged a relentless war against the jerry-builder, and its new building act realizes in some degree the dreams of Carlyle in "Past and Present." Such an act, if it had been enforced in American cities, would have made it impossible for private greed to render some of the business streets of New York and Chicago as sunless as the Naerodal valley in Norway.

The credit for these notable achievements belongs to the Progressive majority in the Council. They framed and put through the policy with the aid of certain liberal Moderates. But in the third election held on March 2d, 1895, this forward movement received a severe check. The periodical backward sweep of public opinion, which marks the history of reform in all countries, has left the elected councilors in the new Council equally divided in numbers, while in the last the Progressives had a large majority. The union of private interests for defense, which the Council's zeal for the public welfare had aroused, proved a powerful organization. The corporation and livery companies of the city, the gas, water, and tramway companies, the rich ground-landlords, the liquor and music hall interests were the enemies which its administration had arrayed against it. Moreover, the Conservatives could not resist the temptation to manœuvre for a good position, with an eye on the coming struggle for the control of the next Parliament. The letters and speeches of Mr. Balfour, Lord George Hamilton, and Mr. Chamberlain, during the campaign, were practically of the nature of an official whip to the Conservative and Liberal Unionist, although certain Liberal Unionists in the Council vigorously protested against fighting a municipal election on national issues. An increase in the rates and the natural conservatism of the English citizen were important factors in producing the result.

But the victory, however gratifying to the Moderates, is likely to be a Pyrrhic one. It has been well said that yesterday's heroic thought is the aggressive power of to-day.

Some features of the Progressive program that were at first stoutly attacked by the Moderates, have now become accepted planks in the platform of the London Municipal Society, which is the chief organization of the Moderates. Three recent votes in the new Council, on acquiring the tramways, the property of the water companies, and on the exclusion of liquor selling from the property of the Council show that on important features of the Progressive program the real Progressive majority is likely to be greater than the nominal one. As the Progressive policy aims at the greatest good of the greatest number, while the Moderate policy is inclined to protect unduly class privilege, vested interests, and private greed, the former policy is likely in the end to win a decisive and lasting triumph.

The Progressives show by their works their faith in the creed of the English Liberal party, as stated recently by Mr. Asquith, the Home Secretary, viz., "that it is not wise for the rational man to lie back with folded hands and to allow the current that carries the fortunes of us all to drift him where it will. We believe that in the history of our race and of our own country there is an increasing purpose of which the larger abundance and fairer apportionment of happiness is the end and the associated energies of human beings in society and in the state are the means." The Progressives might well apply to the bulk of their Moderate opponents the famous words of Mr. Gladstone in 1866,—so fully justified by the course of events—which he uttered on the eve of temporary defeat because of the coalition between the Tories and Adullamites.

"You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side. The great social forces which move onward in their might and majesty are against you. They are marshalled on our side and the banner which we now carry in this fight though perhaps at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, yet it soon again will float in the eye of Heaven and will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and not distant victory."

GEORGE L. FOX.



